DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 341 127 EA 023 581

AUTHOR Ramos, Nancy J.; Santos, Ricardo S.
TITLE Strengthening Links Which Promote Community/School Partnerships.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Cooperation; Elementary Secondary Education; *Parent Participation; Parent Role; *Parent School Relationship; Public Relations; *School Community Programs; *School Community Relationship

ABSTRACT

Issues in establishing and improving school-community partnerships are presented in this paper. Following a review of literature, the essential elements of strong parental involvement programs are described. Five major types of parental involvement programs are identified, and strategies and activities for improving them are offered. A conclusion is that school-community partnerships must develop a positive, symbiotic relationship rather than seek to establish blame. (10 references) (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED341127

STRENGTHENING LINKS WHICH PROMOTE COMMUNITY/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

By

Dr. Nancy J. Ramos
The University of Texas at San Antonio
San Antonio, Texas

And

Dr. Ricardo S. Santos
La Joya Independent School District
La Joya, Texas

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

N. Ramos
R. Santos

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EA 023 581

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

STRENGTHENING LINKS WHICH PROMOTE COMMUNITY/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

INTRODUCTION.

It is a well-established fact that the most important teachers children will ever have are their parents. Education has become an extensive endeavor in which massive resources are applied to developing the intellectual capacity of the young. Yet, in no way can the material resources equal the extensive social and psychological input that can only be provided by parents in the home and reinforced by educators in school. Therefore, an open line of communication becomes a crucial link to the successful implementation of an effective community and school program. When members of a community become involved in the educational process and feel their value is appreciated, the children are the main benefactors. Certainly, then, to ensure academic success in school, it is very important that parents and classroom teachers form a partnership.

Society in general must broaden its definition of parental involvement and embrace the idea that to establish and subsequently strengthen an effective link between the home and school, an open line of communication must be maintained between school personnel and the community it

serves. Rich (1988) has stated that, "Parent involvement must no longer be defined as involvement only in children's schooling, meaning meetings and time spent at the school. Not many parents, especially employed mothers, can participate in this way. Effort must be redirected to involve families in children's education beyond the school setting (p. 90)."

RESEARCH FINDINGS.

Research studies indicate that children are likely to develop positive attitudes toward school when their parents display interest in their school experiences (Pell & Ramirez, 1989). Therefore, parents are strongly encouraged to set a good example by demonstrating that they understand the value of obtaining a good education. Parents should also put forth efforts to create learning experiences which will promote a positive self-concept (Ramos & Santos, 1988).

Some educators may believe that families from lower socio-economic levels are not as interested in their children's education, nor do they have the same goals for their children as do middle class families. However, research (Brandt, 1989) indicates that socio-economic status does not exclude any one group from participation in parental involvement programs. According to Brandt, most parents maintain that "they want their children to succeed; they want to help them and they need the school's and

teacher's help to know what to do with their children at each grade level (p. 27)."

There may also be fear in some school communities regarding the involvement of parents due to a belief that parents, especially those who are linguistically and culturally different, know little about the educational process. However, research data collected by Brandt (1989) further indicates that "schools will be surprised by how much help parents can be if the parents are given useful, clear information about what they can do, especially at home (p. 27)." Brandt has observed, however, that when schools do not make efforts to reach out to parents in the community and involve them in their children's education, "then parent education and family social class are very important for deciding who becomes involved (p. 27). Conversely, "If schools take parent involvement seriously and work to involve all parents, then social class and parents' level of education decrease or disappear as important factors (p. 27)."

Leitch & Tangri (1988) concluded that "Teachers' and parents' lack of knowledge about ways they can use each other more effectively is the major barrier to positive home-school relationships (p. 71)." Their research focused on asking representatives from the school community about barriers to home-school colloboration. Their findings indicated that "nearly 50% of teachers attributed barriers

to parents (p. 72)." This finding led Leitch & Tangri to conclude that "the tendency to blame parents for their child's problems suggests that teachers themselves may be responsible for some of the parents' attitudinal barriers (p. 73)."

Researchers (Brandt, 1989; Leitch & Tangri, 1988; Rosado, 1990) have found that American parents, whether poor, rich, culturally or linguistically different, want their children to experience educational success and they realize that to do this it is vital that they colloborate with educators to meet their children's needs. However, there are often extenuating circumstances which hamper their active participation. Research conducted by Rosado (1990) focused on the participation of ethnic minority parents in the school system. His findings suggest that "as a result of the cultural and linguistic gap, Hispanic parents perceive teachers and principals as being distant and arrogant (p. 3)." However, according to Leitch & Tangri, many "parents also center barriers to involvement in themselves. They cited health problems, economic differences between themselves and teachers, and work responsibilities. Parents also said they felt that teachers looked down on them for not being as successful as teachers (p. 74)."

Although the percentage of parents who actually participate in parental involvement programs may vary

somewhat from school to school, research studies, such as those previously cited, reveal a pattern of concern on the part of parents and a need for guidance from the school administration and teachers with regard to how they can contribute to their children's academic success. Consequently, the existing body of research would seem to indicate that within any school community, there is the potential for building a strong partnership between the home and school. Therefore, it is imperative that efforts be made to identify the characteristics of strong parental involvement programs so that these may be replicated.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF STRONG PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS.

In a recent research project undertaken by the Southwest Education Development Laboratory (SEDL), the following essential elements which characterize a strong parental involvement program were identified: (1) written policies, (2) administrative support, (3) training, (4) a partnership approach, (5) two-way communication, (6) networking, and (7) effective evaluation activities (Williams & Chavkin, 1989).

The SEDL research project revealed that effective parental involvement programs have taken the time to prepare written policies which legitimize the importance of these programs and help both staff and parents better understand the parents' role in the program. Schools with effective

programs have also provided the following types of administrative support: (1) funds designated in the main budget for implementing these programs; (2) material/product resources such as meeting rooms, computers, media equipment, etc.; (3) people were designated to carry out program efforts or events.

To build a strong school/community partnership, training should be made available for school staff as well as for parents (Williams & Chavkin, 1989). Training sessions should not be implemented on a "one-time only" basis, but should occur over time and focus on developing partnering skills -- the skills needed by both parties to improve their skills for working together as well as working with children. Possible topics for this kind of training sessions include: improving parent/teacher conferences, supporting school learning at home, and working as joint decision makers with educators.

According to Williams and Chavkin (1989), parental involvement programs which utilize a "partnership approach" are more likely to be successful in encouraging community participation in school affairs. Activities identified by Williams and Chavkin which reflect the partnership approach include: joint planning, goal setting, definition of roles, program assessment, development of instructional and school support efforts, needs sensing, and setting of school standards (p. 19). They further recommend that committees

of parents and teachers examine the district's curriculum needs, provide support for the district's instructional program, and recommend ways to meet children's special educational needs.

Communication between the home and school must occur frequently and on a regular basis. It is imperative that parents feel that they are welcome in the schools and that importance is placed on their ideas and concerns. Rather than feel threatened by this type of parental input, schools should seize the opportunity to build strong links with the community by using the comments, suggestions, ideas and concerns presented by parents to develop the best possible educational program for their students.

The research project undertaken by SEDL also highlighted the importance of networking with other programs to share information, resources, and technical expertise. Other research findings indicate that regular evaluation activities at key stages as well as at the conclusion of a cycle or phase is very important. These evaluation activities enable both parents and school personnel to make program revisions on a continuous basis and thus strengthen the partnership (Williams and Chavkin, 1989).

FIVE MAJOR TYPES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT.

Positive experiences with parents who volunteer to actively participate in the educational process can strengthen the link between the home and school. Research conducted by Brandt (1989) has resulted in the identification of five types of parental involvement.

The first type of parental involvement focuses on training parents to support their children's studies in the home. One of the things needed to improve parental involvement programs of this type is to place "more attention on the type of involvement parents want most: how to work with their own child at home in ways that help the student succeed and that keep the parents as partners in their children's education across the grades (Brandt, p. 25)."

The second type of parental involvement focuses on effective communication from school to home. It is essential to make "sure that memos and notices are written so that all parents can read them (Brandt, p. 25)." This may often require that memos be sent home in other languages and written in clear terms to ensure that the information is easily understandable.

The third type of parental involvement is related to parents serving as volunteers at school. According to Hunter (1989), "Volunteer parents in the classroom can enrich and extend the curriculum by sharing their career expertise, enthusiasm about avocations, and cultural

knowledge (p. 36)." Based on her research findings, Hunter has come to the following conclusion:

> Only people who have done it can present an occupation with the integrity of direct experience in the assets and liabilities of that lifework, can present a hobby or craft with the enthusiasm of a devotee, and can introduce children to the multitude of pleasant experiences involved in appreciation of the history, geography, art, customs and life experiences of a diversity of cultures; in short, can enrich a curriculum beyond the possibilities presented by the most competent and dedicated professional staff (p. 41).

However, "schools should also find ways for parents to volunteer, other than during the school day, so that those who work can offer assistance to the school too (Brandt, p. 25)." In fact, Brandt suggests that it would be a good idea to change the definition of "volunteer" to include othe members of a community, such as senior citizens, for example.

The fourth type of parental involvement focuses on improving the interaction with the child as a student at home. Parents can support and encourage the completion of homework, as well as participate in the child's education by reinforcing learning in the home. However, guidance from school personnel, especially teachers, is needed for this type of parental involvement to be effective.

The fifth type of parental involvement includes activities which involve parents in leadership roles and school governance. This allows parents to provide input

into policies that affect their child's education, and also contributes to a feeling of control of the environment.

It is thus evident that there are a variety of roles which parents can assume within the educational system. Each of these roles has the potential for being an effective link between the home and the school, thus maximizing the students' opportunity for academic success.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING A PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM.

To strengthen an existing parental involvement program, it is necessary to assess current practices and determine which aspects of the program are working and which are not. According to Brandt, this should be done through interviews and discussions with both school personnel and community representatives. After input has been obtained from parents and teachers, short and long term goals for the program should be clearly defined as well as a plan of action which will insure that these goals are achieved. This would of course include responsibilities which must be fulfilled by the school personnel and community representatives. Brandt has also emphasized the importance of identifying a coordinator or lead teacher for the program. This person "is just as necessary as a guidance counselor, an assistant principal, a school psychologist, or a social worker (p. 27)."

Another researcher, Rich (1988), recommends (1) launching a media campaign about parents as educators; (2) training teachers to work with families as partners; (3) providing ways for families to help each other; (4) involving senior citizens and the larger community and (5) providing learning activities that families can use with children.

If a school system is to be successful in getting parents actively involved in the educational process, it is necessary to identify ways of making parents feel welcome within the school system. Once parents have taken the step of attending a school function, such as a parent training session, it is imperative that school personnel seize the opportunity to get parents so interested that they will become regular participants.

The following activities can be implemented during parent training sessions to build self-esteem and cultural pride. Other activities that can be included in these sessions are arts and crafts lessons. For example, adults might particularly enjoy learning how to make inexpensive gifts such as a Christmas Candy House (Maculaitis & Scheraga, 1988). This type of activity can also be conducted in such a way that attention is focused on the development of English language skills. Subsequent sessions can include activities such as "From Here to There", which

can be used to facilitate decision-making and goal-setting, thus promoting parental empowerment.

Symbolic Scavenger Hunt.

The goal of this activity is to introduce the participants to each other. Participants are asked to go on a "scavenger hunt" in their wallet or purse. They are to select four objects representing each of the following: security, insecurity, frustration, and warmth. After this is done, the participants describe the objects selected, and in this way, become acquainted with each other.

Puzzle Pieces.

The session leader will prepare for this session by cutting a poster board into various shapes resembling puzzle pieces. Each of the participants receives a puzzle piece on which they are to depict or describe something they have accomplished which makes them feel proud. They are then to put the pices together to complete the puzzle, thus promoting a feeling of group identity as they realize that all of their individual pieces put together make a whole.

Cultural Coat of Arms.

The "Cultural Coat of Arms" is an activity aimed at developing cultural pride through symbolizing in pictorial form the qualities which make a person unique and special (Matiella, 1988). The participants are provided with the outline of a coat of arms which has been divided into four quadrants. In the first quadrant, the student is to

symbolize a characteristic of a country, other than the United States, with which s/he closely identifies. In the second quadrant, the student is to symbolize something of importance that was learned from the family. The student is to draw a favorite food in the third quadrant. In the fourth quadrant, the student is asked to identify what is to be written on his/her tombstone.

From Here to There.

An activity aimed at helping students learn how to set goals is called "From Here to There." Participants are provided with a sheet of paper on which three windows are illustrated. In the first window, the students are asked to describe or depict where they are now on a personal or professional level. The second window is to be used to depict a goal they want to achieve. In the third window, the participants are to identify the risks and consequences involved in going from the first to the second window. Activities such as these can promote cultural pride and enhance feelings of control over present and future situations.

CONCLUSION.

Historically, there has been a lukewarm relationship between educators and parents. A frequent topic of discussion on both sides has focused on establishing blame. Educators blame parents and parents blame educators for

problems and concerns which may surface in regard to the education of their children. The establishment of blame is irrelevant. What is important is that the community and the school system take steps to develop a symbiotic relationship. A positive relationship should become the norm rather than the exception. Educators and parents who actively work toward establishing a good working relationship will find that the educational success of children in the community is enhanced. The greatest gift a school can offer the community it serves is to provide an appropriate and challenging education for its children. However, this becomes even more significant when both parents and school personnel join together to work toward achieving this goal. This type of relationship will maximize opportunities for children to reach their educational potential.

REFERENCES

Brandt, R. (1989). On parents and schools: A conversation with Joyce Epstein. Educational Leadership, pp. 24-27.

Hunter, M. (1989). Join the "par-aide" in education. Educational Leadership, pp. 36-41.

Leitch, M.L. & Tangri, S. S. (1988). Barriers to home - school collaboration. Educational Horizons, pp. 70-74.

Maculaitis, J.D. & Scheraga, M. (1988). What to do before the books arrive (and after). The Alemany Press, pp. 31-32.

Matiella, A.C. 1988. Cultural pride. Santa Cruz, CA: Network Publications.

Pell, E. & Ramirez, E. (1989). Making the most of your child's education. Washington, D.C.: ASPIRA Institute for Policy Research.

Ramos, N. & Santos, R. (1988). School plus home equals student success. San Antonio: Target '90/Goals for San Antonio.

Rich, D. (1988). Bridging the parent gap in education reform. Educational Horizons' pp. 90-92.

Rosado, L. (1990). Language and culture hinder the involvement of Hispanic parents in the education of their children. La voz de SAAABE, pp. 3-4.

Williams, D. L. & Chavkin, N.F. (1989). Essential elements of strong parent involvement programs. Educational Leadership, pp. 18-20.